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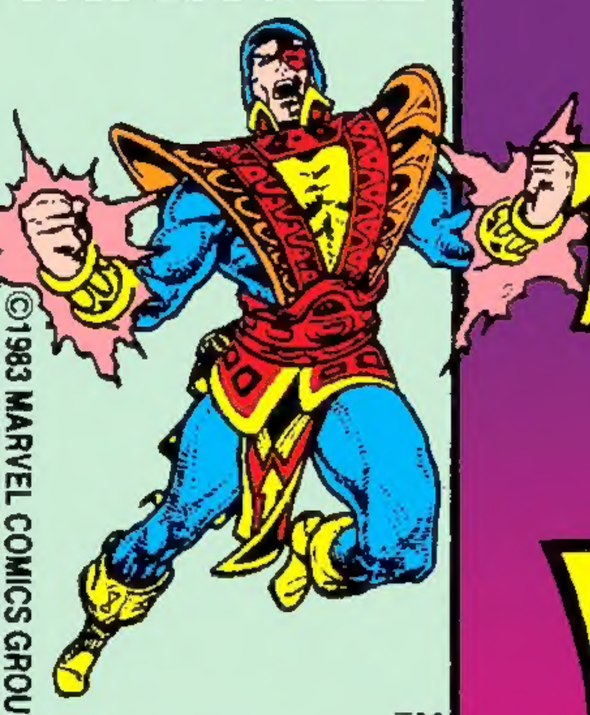

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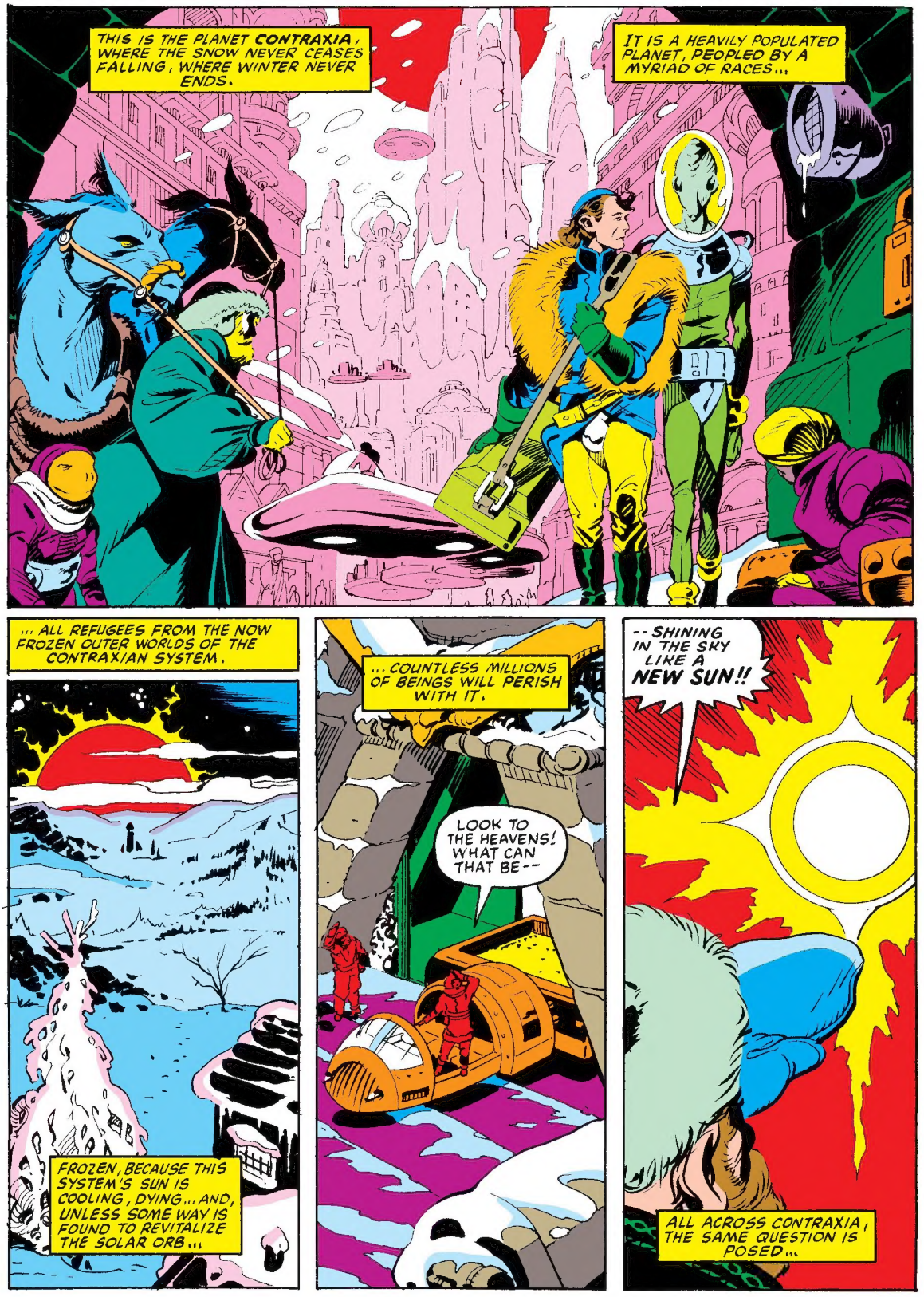
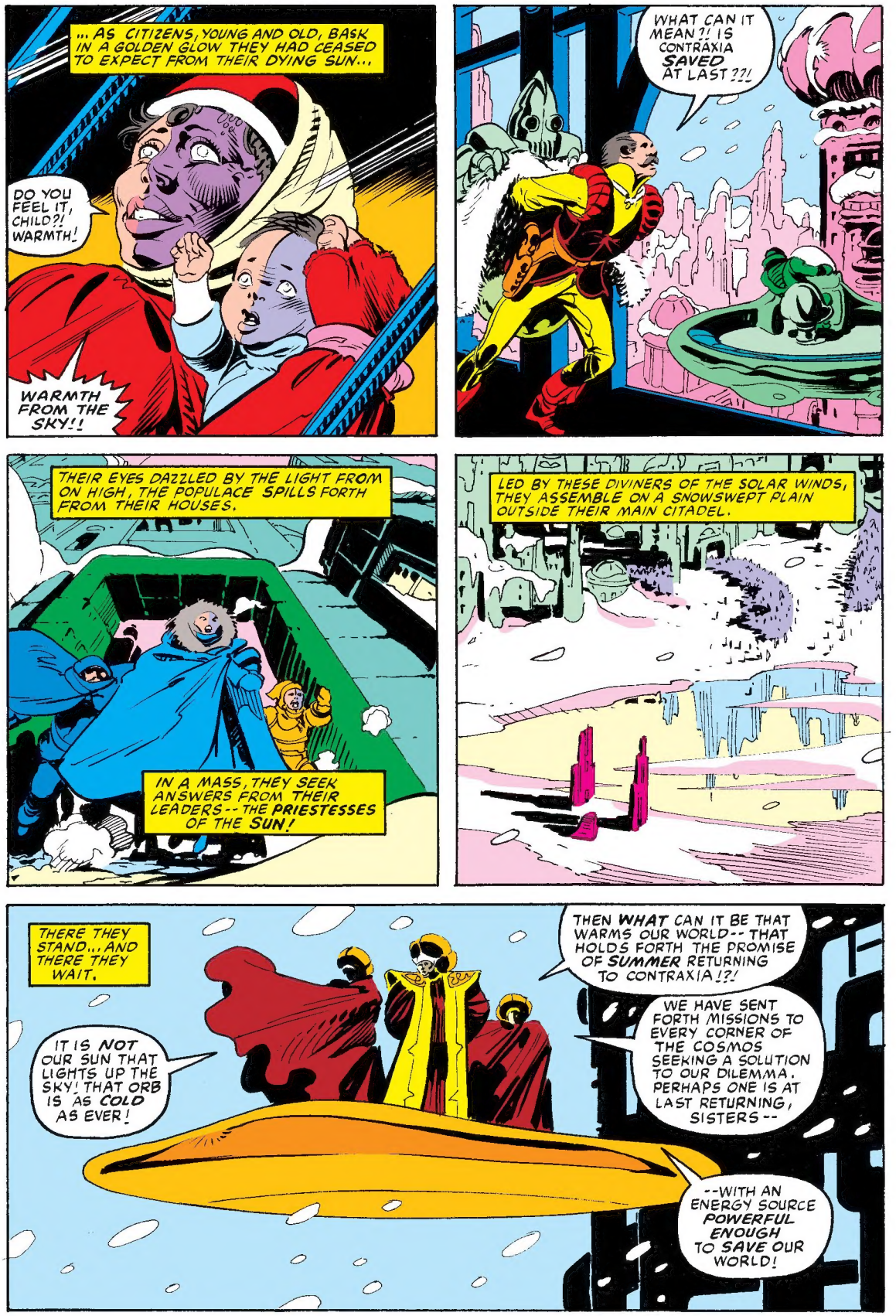
#3 IN A FOUR-ISSUE LIMITED SERIES

THE JACK OF HEARTS

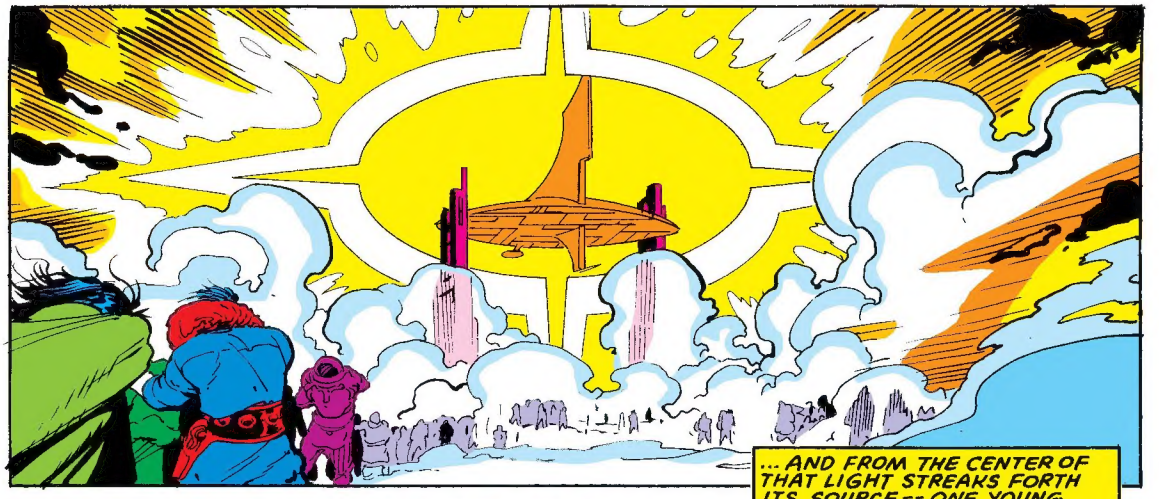
TM

SACRIFICE OF A HERO!


THIS IS THE PLANET CONTRAXIA, WHERE THE SNOW NEVER CEASES FALLING, WHERE WINTER NEVER ENDS.
IT IS A HEAVILY POPULATED PLANET, PEOPLED BY A MYRIAD OF RACES...
... ALL REFUGEES FROM THE NOW FROZEN OUTER WORLDS OF THE CONTRAXIAN SYSTEM.
FROZEN, BECAUSE THIS SYSTEM'S SUN IS COOLING, DYING... AND, UNLESS SOME WAY IS FOUND TO REVITALIZE THE SOLAR ORB...
... COUNTLESS MILLIONS OF BEINGS WILL PERISH WITH IT.
LOOK TO THE HEAVENS! WHAT CAN THAT BE--
-- SHINING IN THE SKY LIKE A NEW SUN!!
ALL ACROSS CONTRAXIA, THE SAME QUESTION IS POSED...


...AS CITIZENS, YOUNG AND OLD, BASK IN A GOLDEN GLOW THEY HAD CEASED TO EXPECT FROM THEIR DYING SUN...
DO YOU FEEL IT, CHILD?! WARMTH!
WARMTH FROM THE SKY!!
WHAT CAN IT MEAN?! IS CONTRAXIA SAVED AT LAST??!
THEIR EYES DAZZLED BY THE LIGHT FROM ON HIGH, THE POPULACE SPILLS FORTH FROM THEIR HOUSES.
IN A MASS, THEY SEEK ANSWERS FROM THEIR LEADERS -- THE PRIESTESSES OF THE SUN!
LED BY THESE DIVINERS OF THE SOLAR WINDS, THEY ASSEMBLE ON A SNOWSWEPT PLAIN OUTSIDE THEIR MAIN CITADEL.
THERE THEY STAND... AND THERE THEY WAIT.
IT IS NOT OUR SUN THAT LIGHTS UP THE SKY! THAT ORB IS AS COLD AS EVER!
THEN WHAT CAN IT BE THAT WARMS OUR WORLD -- THAT HOLDS FORTH THE PROMISE OF SUMMER RETURNING TO CONTRAXIA!?!
WE HAVE SENT FORTH MISSIONS TO EVERY CORNER OF THE COSMOS SEEKING A SOLUTION TO OUR DILEMMA. PERHAPS ONE IS AT LAST RETURNING, SISTERS --
--WITH AN ENERGY SOURCE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO SAVE OUR WORLD!

A HUSH THEN FALLS OVER THE THRONGS GATHERED ON THE PLAIN. AS IF FROM LIGHT-YEARS OFF, A WHISPER FROM SPACE IS HEARD. THE WHISPER BECOMES A ROAR OF STARDRIVE ENGINES. THE ROAR IS ACCOMPANIED BY THE LIGHT--AS BRIGHT AND WARM AS THEIR SUN ONCE WAS...



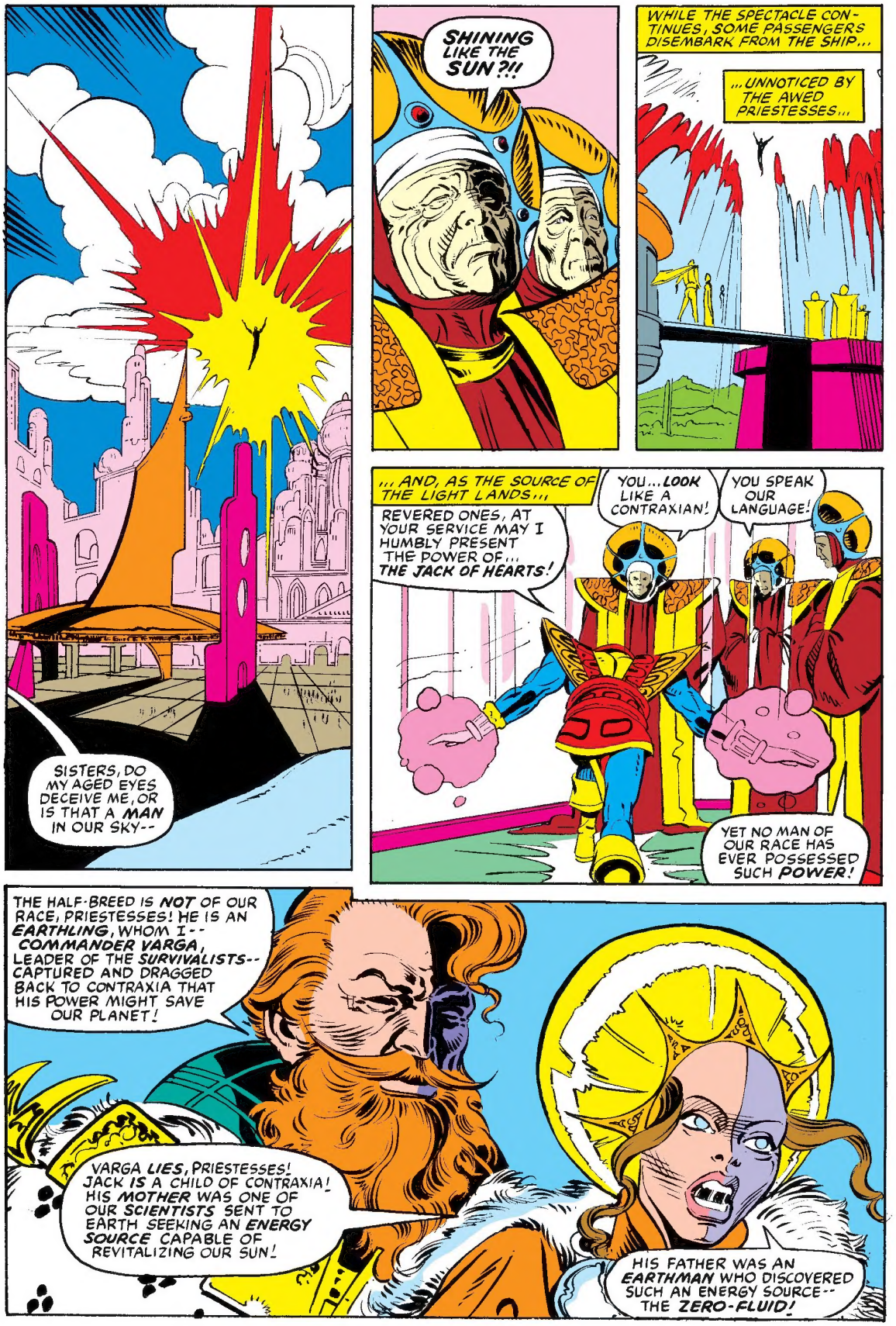
...AND FROM THE CENTER OF THAT LIGHT STREAKS FORTH ITS SOURCE -- ONE YOUNG MAN WHO MAY WELL POSSESS THE POWER TO SAVE A WORLD!

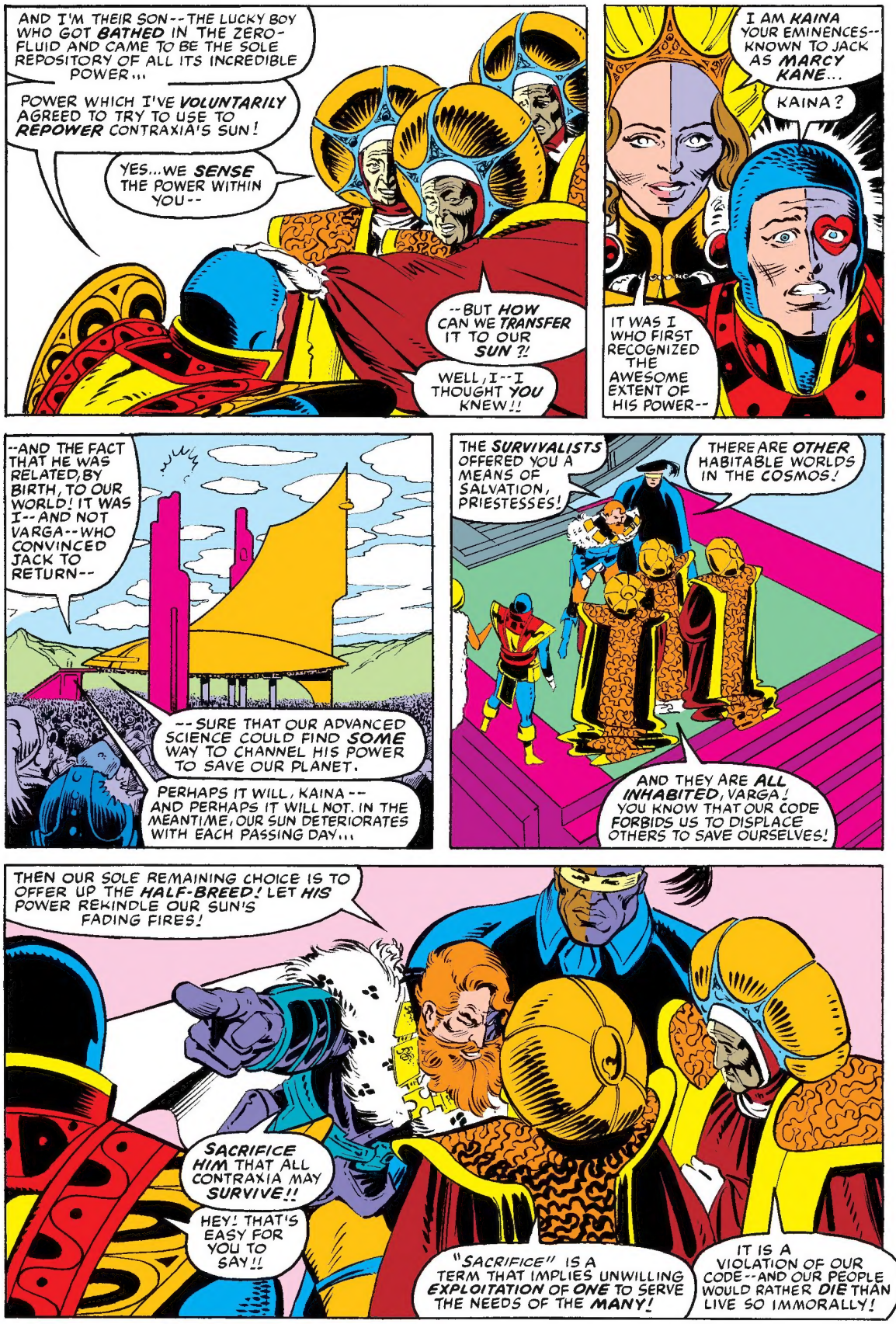
Stan Lee PRESENTS:

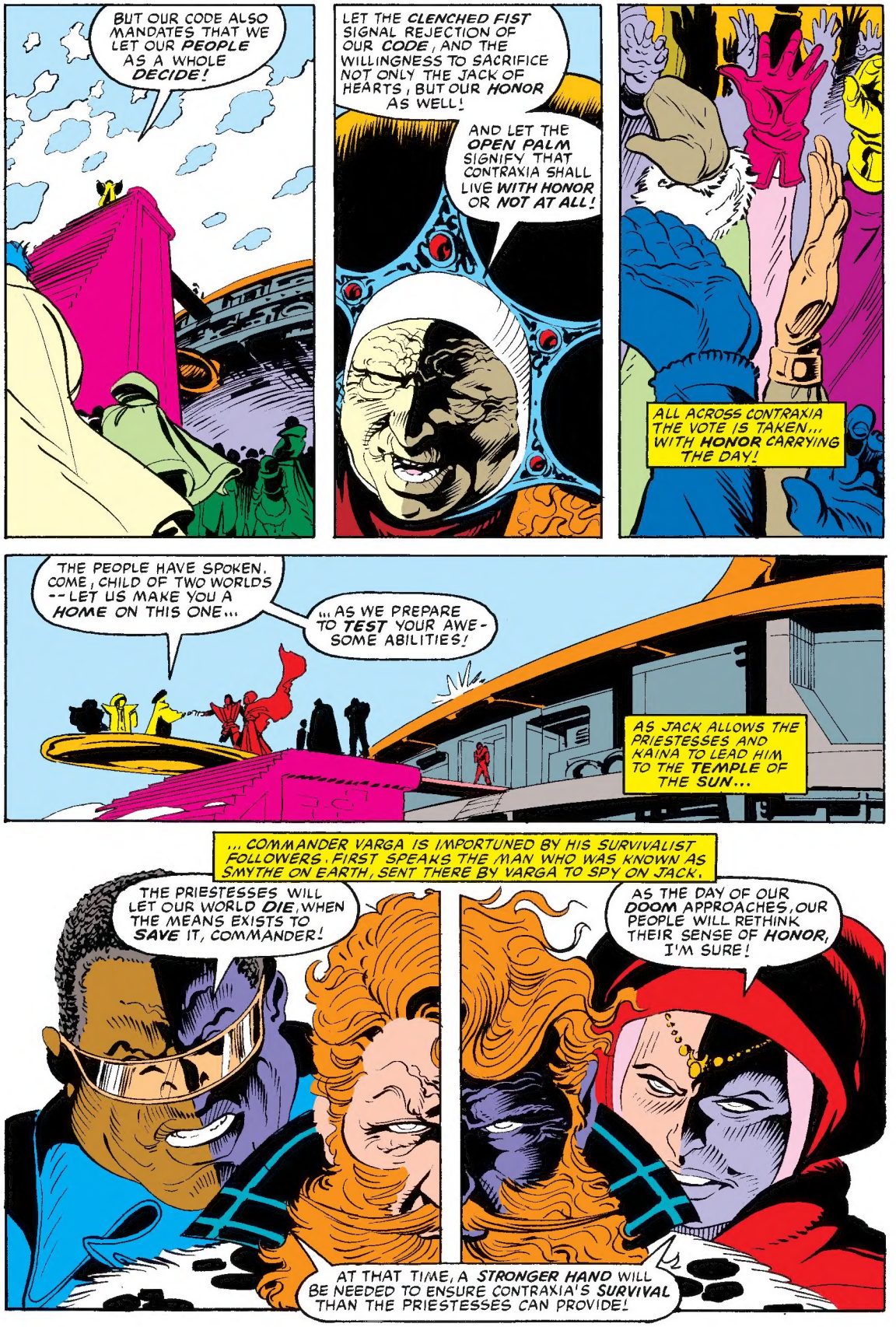
THE JACK OF HEARTS

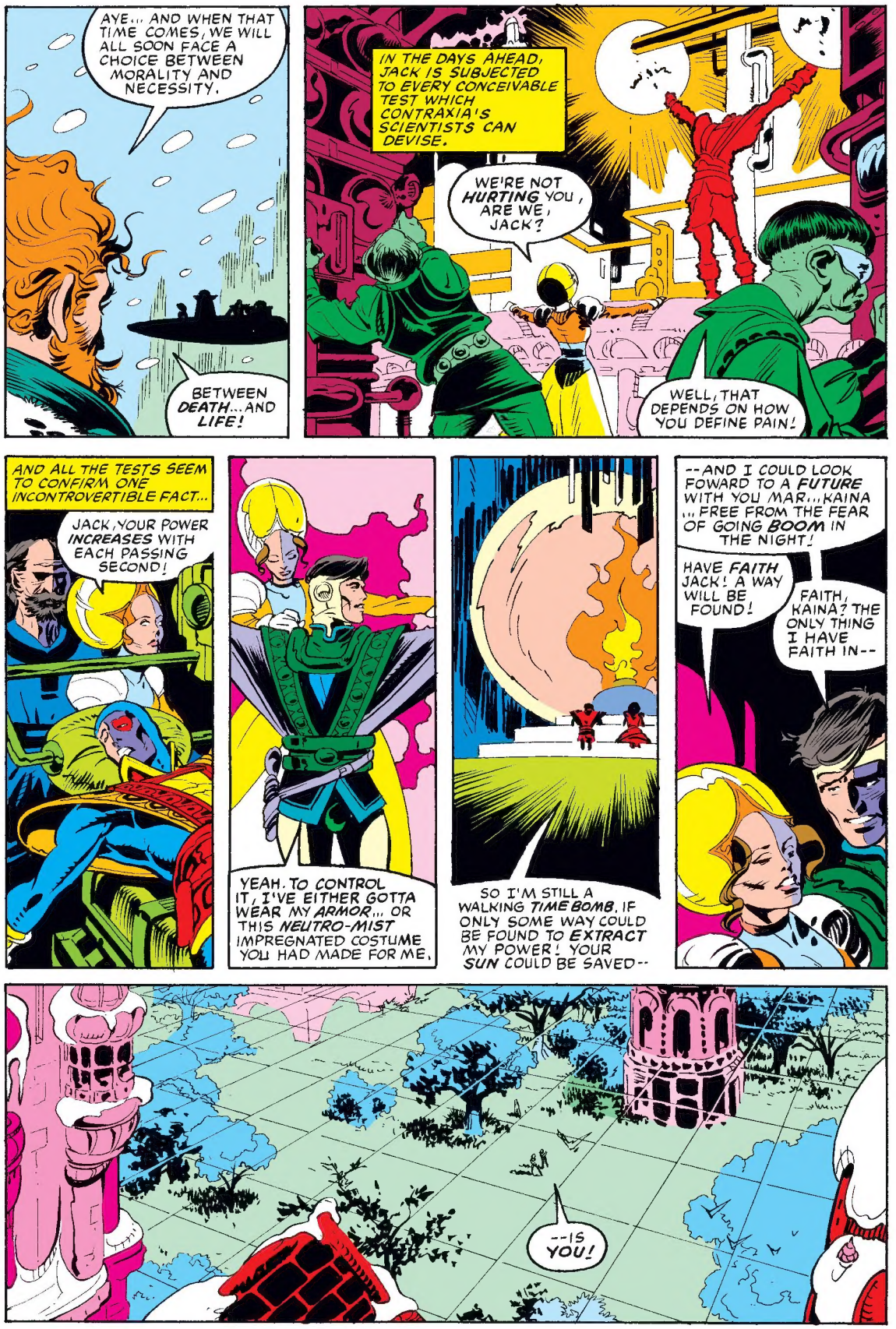
Kerkluk!

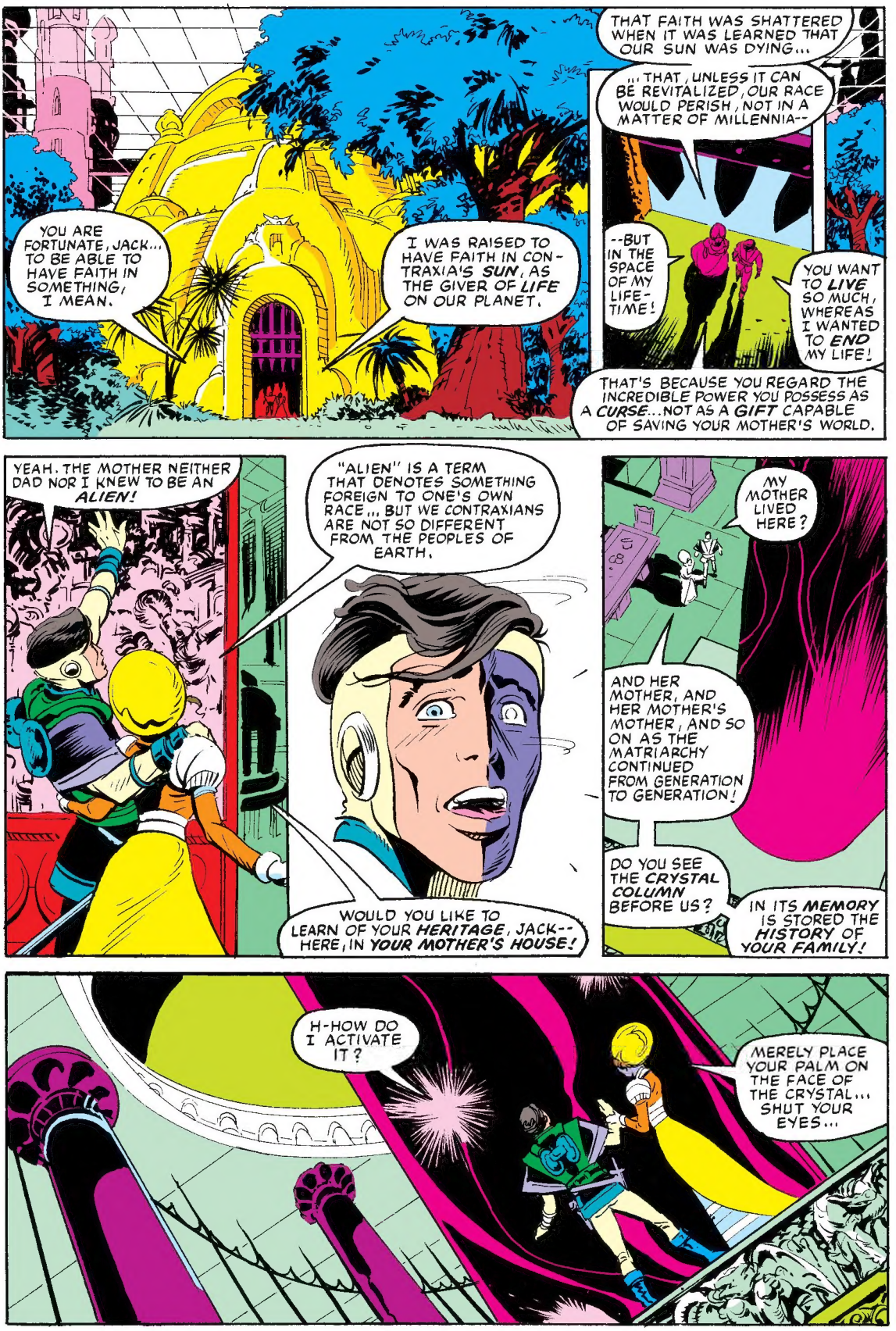
BILL MANTLO —— STORY
GEORGE FREEMAN — ART
JOHN MORELLI —— LETTERS
BURNS & FERRITER — COLORS
BOB BUDIANSKY —— EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER —— OVERLORD

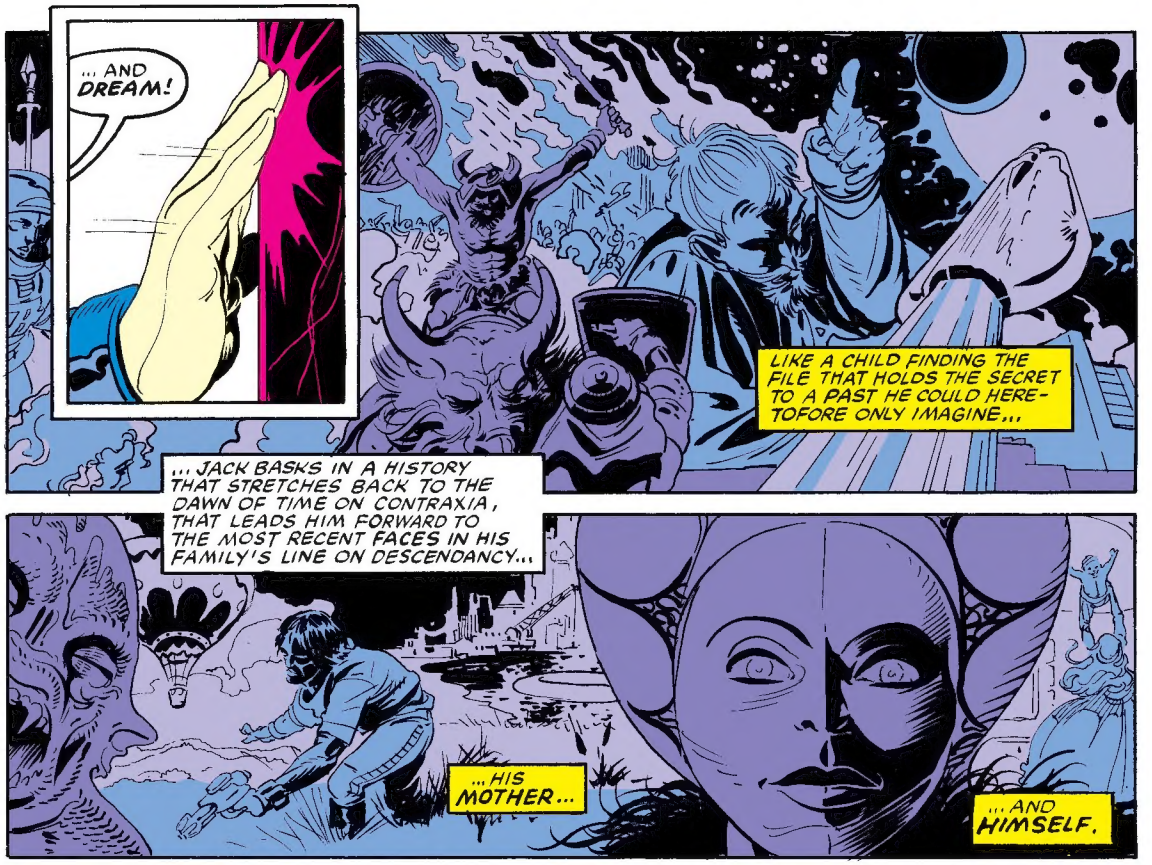

SISTERS, DO MY AGED EYES DECEIVE ME, OR IS THAT A MAN IN OUR SKY--
SHINING LIKE THE SUN?!!
WHILE THE SPECTACLE CONTINUES, SOME PASSENGERS DISEMBARK FROM THE SHIP...
...UNNOTICED BY THE AWED PRIESTESSES...
...AND, AS THE SOURCE OF THE LIGHT LANDS...
REVERED ONES, AT YOUR SERVICE MAY I HUMBLY PRESENT THE POWER OF... THE JACK OF HEARTS!
YOU...LOOK LIKE A CONTRAXIAN!
YOU SPEAK OUR LANGUAGE!
YET NO MAN OF OUR RACE HAS EVER POSSESSED SUCH POWER!
THE HALF-BREED IS NOT OF OUR RACE, PRIESTESSES! HE IS AN EARTHLING, WHOM I-- COMMANDER VARGA, LEADER OF THE SURVIVALISTS-- CAPTURED AND DRAGGED BACK TO CONTRAXIA THAT HIS POWER MIGHT SAVE OUR PLANET!
VARGA LIES, PRIESTESSES! JACK IS A CHILD OF CONTRAXIA! HIS MOTHER WAS ONE OF OUR SCIENTISTS SENT TO EARTH SEEKING AN ENERGY SOURCE CAPABLE OF REVITALIZING OUR SUN!
HIS FATHER WAS AN EARTHMAN WHO DISCOVERED SUCH AN ENERGY SOURCE-- THE ZERO-FLUID!


AND I'M THEIR SON--THE LUCKY BOY WHO GOT BATHED IN THE ZERO-FLUID AND CAME TO BE THE SOLE REPOSITORY OF ALL ITS INCREDIBLE POWER...
POWER WHICH I'VE VOLUNTARILY AGREED TO TRY TO USE TO REPOWER CONTRAXIA'S SUN!
YES...WE SENSE THE POWER WITHIN YOU--
--BUT HOW CAN WE TRANSFER IT TO OUR SUN?!
WELL, I--I THOUGHT YOU KNEW!!
I AM KAINA YOUR EMINENCES--KNOWN TO JACK AS MARCY KANE...
KAINA?
IT WAS I WHO FIRST RECOGNIZED THE AWESOME EXTENT OF HIS POWER--
--AND THE FACT THAT HE WAS RELATED, BY BIRTH, TO OUR WORLD! IT WAS I--AND NOT VARGA--WHO CONVINCED JACK TO RETURN--
--SURE THAT OUR ADVANCED SCIENCE COULD FIND SOME WAY TO CHANNEL HIS POWER TO SAVE OUR PLANET.
PERHAPS IT WILL, KAINA--AND PERHAPS IT WILL NOT. IN THE MEANTIME, OUR SUN DETERIORATES WITH EACH PASSING DAY...
THE SURVIVALISTS OFFERED YOU A MEANS OF SALVATION, PRIESTESSES!
THERE ARE OTHER HABITABLE WORLDS IN THE COSMOS!
AND THEY ARE ALL INHABITED, VARGA! YOU KNOW THAT OUR CODE FORBIDS US TO DISPLACE OTHERS TO SAVE OURSELVES!
THEN OUR SOLE REMAINING CHOICE IS TO OFFER UP THE HALF-BREED! LET HIS POWER REKINDLE OUR SUN'S FADING FIRES!
SACRIFICE HIM THAT ALL CONTRAXIA MAY SURVIVE!!
HEY! THAT'S EASY FOR YOU TO SAY!!
"SACRIFICE" IS A TERM THAT IMPLIES UNWILLING EXPLOITATION OF ONE TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF THE MANY!
IT IS A VIOLATION OF OUR CODE--AND OUR PEOPLE WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LIVE SO IMMORALLY!

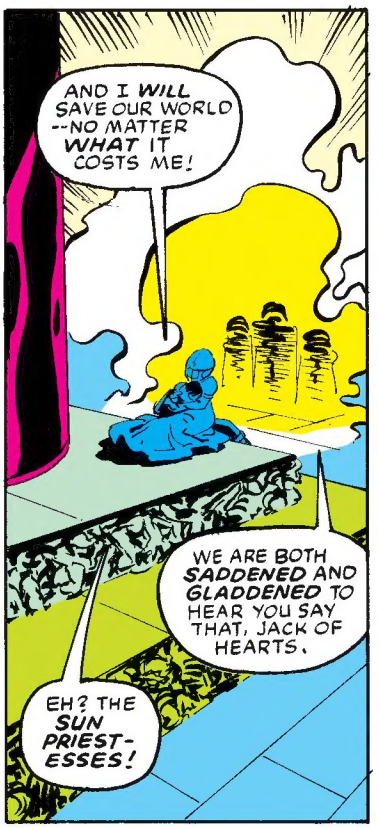

BUT OUR CODE ALSO MANDATES THAT WE LET OUR PEOPLE AS A WHOLE DECIDE!
LET THE CLENCHED FIST SIGNAL REJECTION OF OUR CODE, AND THE WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE NOT ONLY THE JACK OF HEARTS, BUT OUR HONOR AS WELL!
AND LET THE OPEN PALM SIGNIFY THAT CONTRAXIA SHALL LIVE WITH HONOR OR NOT AT ALL!
ALL ACROSS CONTRAXIA THE VOTE IS TAKEN... WITH HONOR CARRYING THE DAY!
THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN. COME, CHILD OF TWO WORLDS --LET US MAKE YOU A HOME ON THIS ONE...
...AS WE PREPARE TO TEST YOUR AWE-SOME ABILITIES!
AS JACK ALLOWS THE PRIESTESSES AND KAINA TO LEAD HIM TO THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN...
...COMMANDER VARGA IS IMPORTUNED BY HIS SURVIVALIST FOLLOWERS. FIRST SPEAKS THE MAN WHO WAS KNOWN AS SMYTHE ON EARTH, SENT THERE BY VARGA TO SPY ON JACK.
THE PRIESTESSES WILL LET OUR WORLD DIE, WHEN THE MEANS EXISTS TO SAVE IT, COMMANDER!
AS THE DAY OF OUR DOOM APPROACHES, OUR PEOPLE WILL RETHINK THEIR SENSE OF HONOR, I'M SURE!
AT THAT TIME, A STRONGER HAND WILL BE NEEDED TO ENSURE CONTRAXIA'S SURVIVAL THAN THE PRIESTESSES CAN PROVIDE!


AYE... AND WHEN THAT TIME COMES, WE WILL ALL SOON FACE A CHOICE BETWEEN MORALITY AND NECESSITY.
BETWEEN DEATH... AND LIFE!
IN THE DAYS AHEAD, JACK IS SUBJECTED TO EVERY CONCEIVABLE TEST WHICH CONTRAXIA'S SCIENTISTS CAN DEVISE.
WE'RE NOT HURTING YOU, ARE WE, JACK?
WELL, THAT DEPENDS ON HOW YOU DEFINE PAIN!
AND ALL THE TESTS SEEM TO CONFIRM ONE INCONTROVERTIBLE FACT...
JACK, YOUR POWER INCREASES WITH EACH PASSING SECOND!
YEAH. TO CONTROL IT, I'VE EITHER GOTTA WEAR MY ARMOR... OR THIS NEUTRO-MIST IMPREGNATED COSTUME YOU HAD MADE FOR ME.
SO I'M STILL A WALKING TIME BOMB. IF ONLY SOME WAY COULD BE FOUND TO EXTRACT MY POWER! YOUR SUN COULD BE SAVED--
--AND I COULD LOOK FOWARD TO A FUTURE WITH YOU MAR... KAINA ... FREE FROM THE FEAR OF GOING BOOM IN THE NIGHT!
HAVE FAITH JACK! A WAY WILL BE FOUND!
FAITH, KAINA? THE ONLY THING I HAVE FAITH IN--
--IS YOU!


YOU ARE FORTUNATE, JACK... TO BE ABLE TO HAVE FAITH IN SOMETHING, I MEAN.
I WAS RAISED TO HAVE FAITH IN CONTRAXIA'S SUN, AS THE GIVER OF LIFE ON OUR PLANET.
THAT FAITH WAS SHATTERED WHEN IT WAS LEARNED THAT OUR SUN WAS DYING...
...THAT, UNLESS IT CAN BE REVITALIZED, OUR RACE WOULD PERISH, NOT IN A MATTER OF MILLENNIA--
--BUT IN THE SPACE OF MY LIFE-TIME!
YOU WANT TO LIVE SO MUCH, WHEREAS I WANTED TO END MY LIFE!
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU REGARD THE INCREDIBLE POWER YOU POSSESS AS A CURSE...NOT AS A GIFT CAPABLE OF SAVING YOUR MOTHER'S WORLD.
YEAH. THE MOTHER NEITHER DAD NOR I KNEW TO BE AN ALIEN!
"ALIEN" IS A TERM THAT DENOTES SOMETHING FOREIGN TO ONE'S OWN RACE... BUT WE CONTRAXIANS ARE NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM THE PEOPLES OF EARTH.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN OF YOUR HERITAGE, JACK-- HERE, IN YOUR MOTHER'S HOUSE!
MY MOTHER LIVED HERE?
AND HER MOTHER, AND HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND SO ON AS THE MATRIARCHY CONTINUED FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION!
DO YOU SEE THE CRYSTAL COLUMN BEFORE US?
IN ITS MEMORY IS STORED THE HISTORY OF YOUR FAMILY!
H-HOW DO I ACTIVATE IT?
MERELY PLACE YOUR PALM ON THE FACE OF THE CRYSTAL... SHUT YOUR EYES...

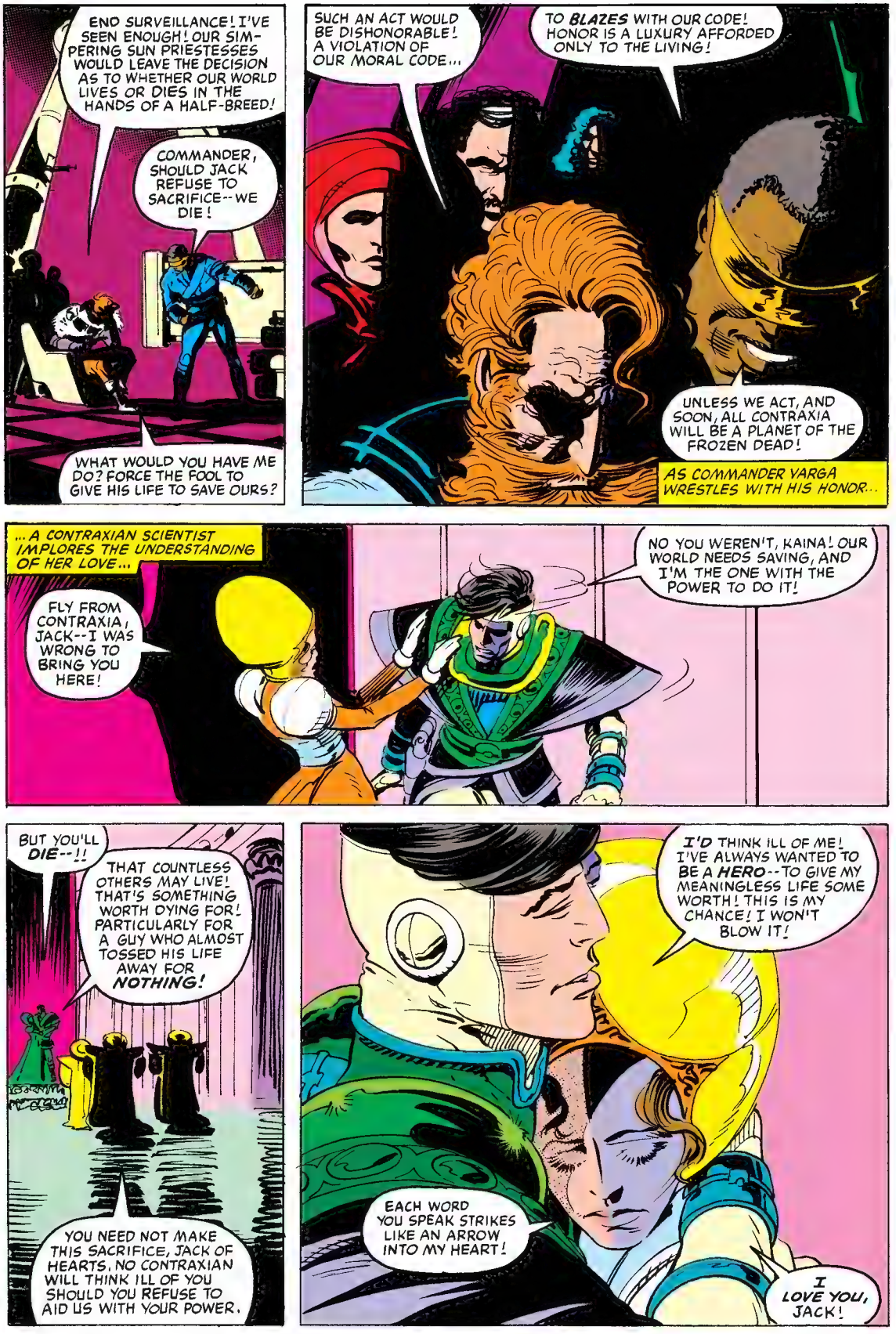

... AND DREAM!
LIKE A CHILD FINDING THE FILE THAT HOLDS THE SECRET TO A PAST HE COULD HERE-TOFORE ONLY IMAGINE...
...JACK BASKS IN A HISTORY THAT STRETCHES BACK TO THE DAWN OF TIME ON CONTRAXIA, THAT LEADS HIM FORWARD TO THE MOST RECENT FACES IN HIS FAMILY'S LINE ON DESCENDANCY...
...HIS MOTHER...
...AND HIMSELF.

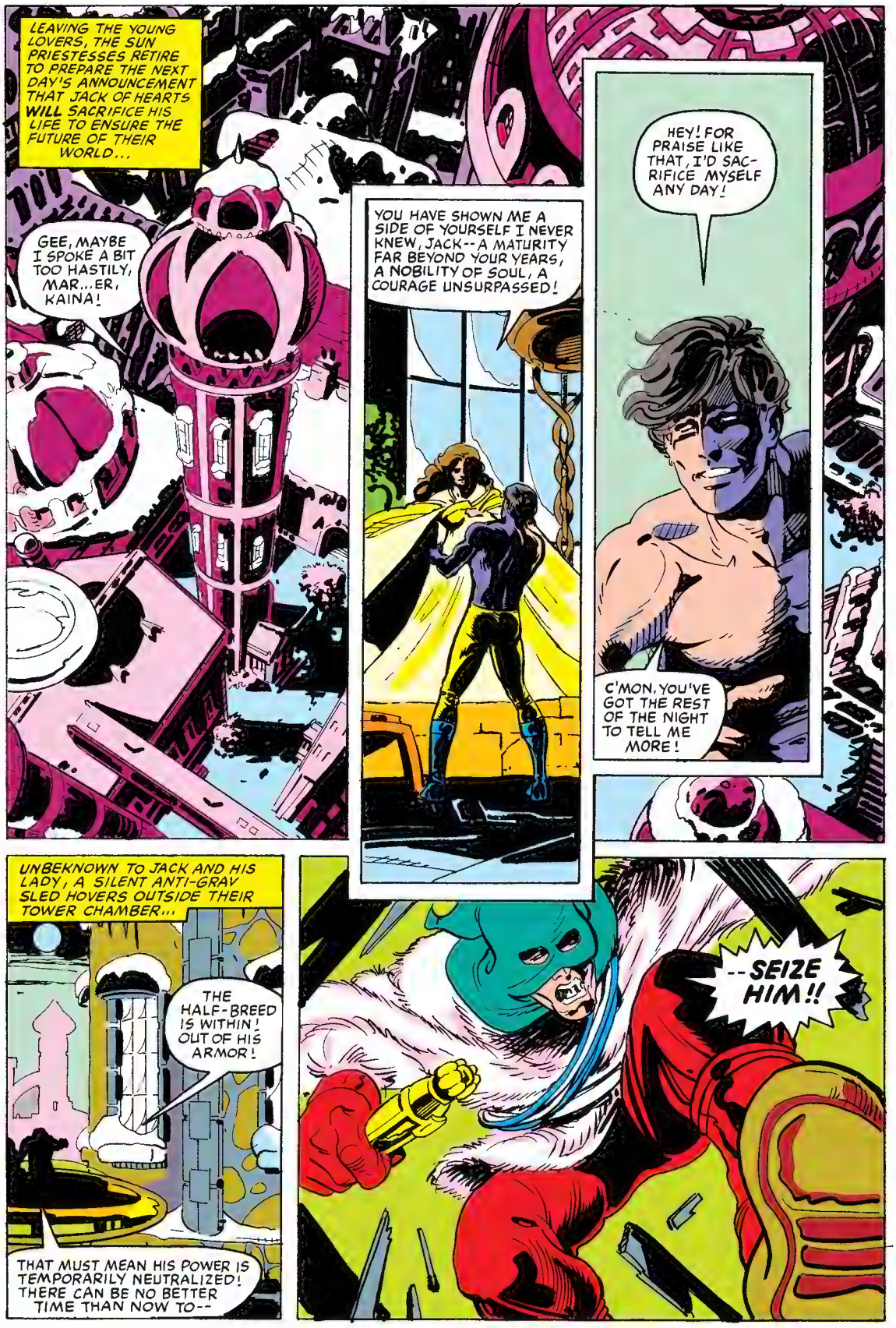
KAINA, YOU... YOU'VE SHOWN ME A REASON --BESIDES SAVING YOU--
-- WHY I SHOULD USE MY POWER TO AID CONTRAXIA!


AND I WILL SAVE OUR WORLD --NO MATTER WHAT IT COSTS ME!
WE ARE BOTH SADDENED AND GLADDENED TO HEAR YOU SAY THAT, JACK OF HEARTS.
EH? THE SUN PRIEST-ESSES!

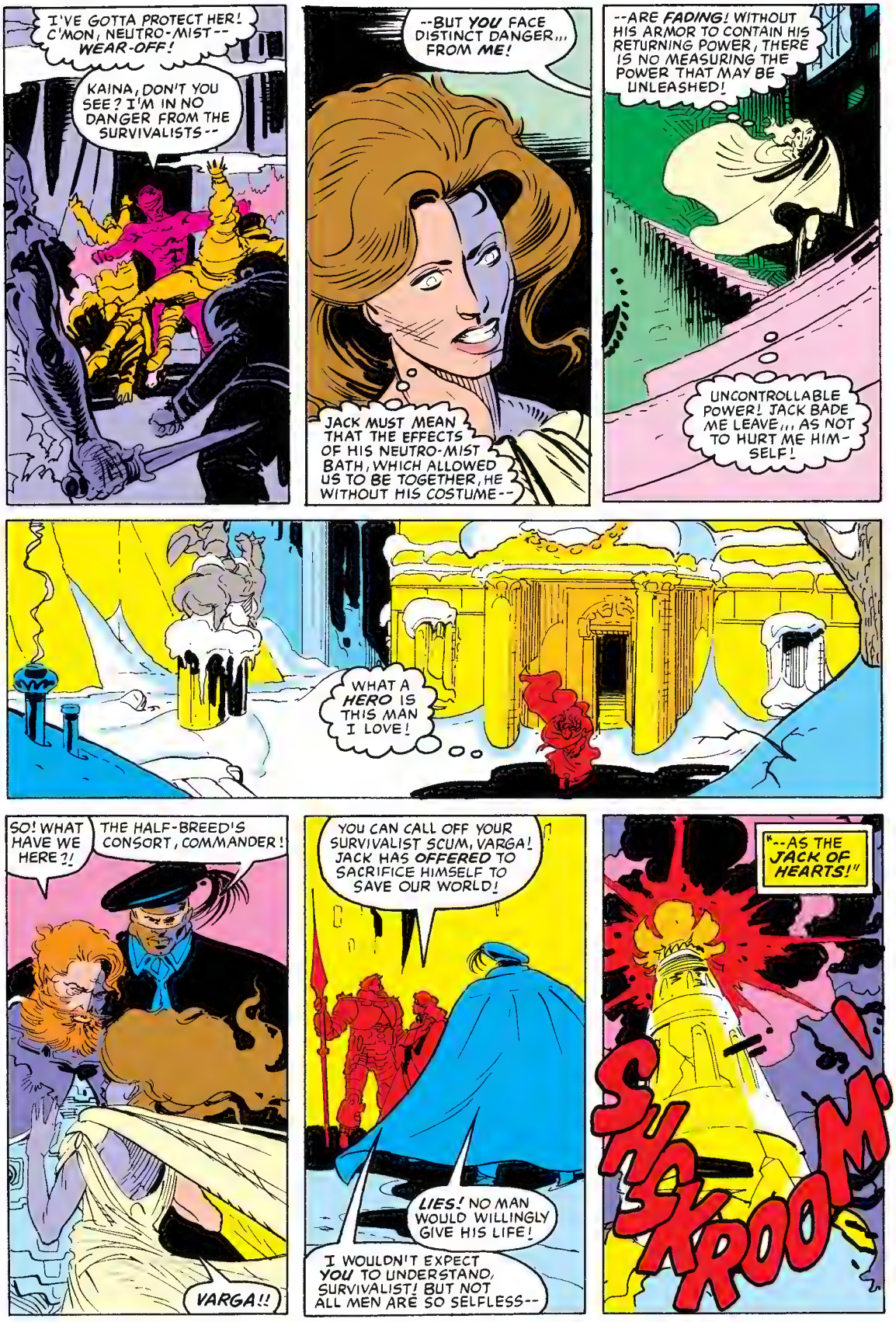
YES. THE RESULTS OF THE TESTS WE PERFORMED UPON YOU ARE IN. THEY SHOW THAT THE POWER YOU POSSESS CANNOT BE EXTRACTED!
THUS ONLY YOU, JACK, CAN WIELD THE POWER. ONLY YOU CAN SAVE OUR SUN.
THE COST MAY WELL BE...

...YOUR LIFE!!
NO! THERE MUST BE ANOTHER WAY!
WE WOULD THAT THERE WAS, KAINA--BUT THERE IS NOT!
WE WERE READY TO DIE WITH DIGNITY BEFORE! WE'LL DO SO NOW!
IS YOUR ANSWER THE SAME AS KAINA'S, JACK OF HEARTS? POSSESSING THE POWER TO SAVE YOUR PEOPLE--
--CAN YOU LET THE PLANET OF YOUR ANCESTORS DIE?
NO!!


END SURVEILLANCE! I'VE SEEN ENOUGH! OUR SIMPERING SUN PRIESTESSES WOULD LEAVE THE DECISION AS TO WHETHER OUR WORLD LIVES OR DIES IN THE HANDS OF A HALF-BREED!
COMMANDER, SHOULD JACK REFUSE TO SACRIFICE--WE DIE!
WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO? FORCE THE FOOL TO GIVE HIS LIFE TO SAVE OURS?
SUCH AN ACT WOULD BE DISHONORABLE! A VIOLATION OF OUR MORAL CODE...
TO BLAZES WITH OUR CODE! HONOR IS A LUXURY AFFORDED ONLY TO THE LIVING!
UNLESS WE ACT, AND SOON, ALL CONTRAXIA WILL BE A PLANET OF THE FROZEN DEAD!
AS COMMANDER YARGA WRESTLES WITH HIS HONOR...
...A CONTRAXIAN SCIENTIST IMPLORES THE UNDERSTANDING OF HER LOVE...
FLY FROM CONTRAXIA, JACK--I WAS WRONG TO BRING YOU HERE!
NO YOU WEREN'T, KAINA! OUR WORLD NEEDS SAVING, AND I'M THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO DO IT!
BUT YOU'LL DIE--!!
THAT COUNTLESS OTHERS MAY LIVE! THAT'S SOMETHING WORTH DYING FOR! PARTICULARLY FOR A GUY WHO ALMOST TOSSED HIS LIFE AWAY FOR NOTHING!
YOU NEED NOT MAKE THIS SACRIFICE, JACK OF HEARTS. NO CONTRAXIAN WILL THINK ILL OF YOU SHOULD YOU REFUSE TO AID US WITH YOUR POWER.
I'D THINK ILL OF ME! I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A HERO--TO GIVE MY MEANINGLESS LIFE SOME WORTH! THIS IS MY CHANCE! I WON'T BLOW IT!
EACH WORD YOU SPEAK STRIKES LIKE AN ARROW INTO MY HEART!
I LOVE YOU, JACK!


LEAVING THE YOUNG LOVERS, THE SUN PRIESTESSES RETIRE TO PREPARE THE NEXT DAY'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT JACK OF HEARTS WILL SACRIFICE HIS LIFE TO ENSURE THE FUTURE OF THEIR WORLD...
GEE, MAYBE I SPOKE A BIT TOO HASTILY, MAR...ER, KAINA!
YOU HAVE SHOWN ME A SIDE OF YOURSELF I NEVER KNEW, JACK--A MATURITY FAR BEYOND YOUR YEARS, A NOBILITY OF SOUL, A COURAGE UNSURPASSED!
HEY! FOR PRAISE LIKE THAT, I'D SACRIFICE MYSELF ANY DAY!
C'MON, YOU'VE GOT THE REST OF THE NIGHT TO TELL ME MORE!
UNBEKNOWN TO JACK AND HIS LADY, A SILENT ANTI-GRAV SLED HOVERS OUTSIDE THEIR TOWER CHAMBER...
THE HALF-BREED IS WITHIN! OUT OF HIS ARMOR!
THAT MUST MEAN HIS POWER IS TEMPORARILY NEUTRALIZED! THERE CAN BE NO BETTER TIME THAN NOW TO--
--SEIZE HIM!!

SURVIVALISTS!
NOW??
WE'VE COME TO ENSURE THAT YOUR POWER IS SACRIFICED TO SAVE OUR WORLD!
I HATE TO BREAK THIS TO YOU GUYS--BUT YOU'RE A LITTLE LATE!
MARCY, RUN!
I'LL POUND SOME SENSE INTO THESE SUCKERS' HEADS WHILE YOU ALERT THE GUARDS!
NO, JACK! JUST AS YOU HAVE MADE YOUR DECISION, I HAVE MADE MINE! I LOVE YOU!
AND I WILL EITHER LIVE WITH YOU, OR DIE BY YOUR SIDE!
"DIE BY MY SIDE?" NO WAY! PART OF MY "NOBLE SACRIFICE" IS THAT I'LL BE SAVING MARCY, uh, KAINA, WHATEVER THE HECK HER NAME IS!
I DON'T KNOW IF I'D FEEL SO STRONGLY ABOUT SAVING CONTRAXIA'S HASH UNLESS I HAD SOME GUARANTEE SHE'D SURVIVE!
I'LL HAVE NO INCLINATION AT ALL TO OFFER MY LIFE IF SHE DIES AT THE HANDS OF THESE SURVIVALISTS THUGS!

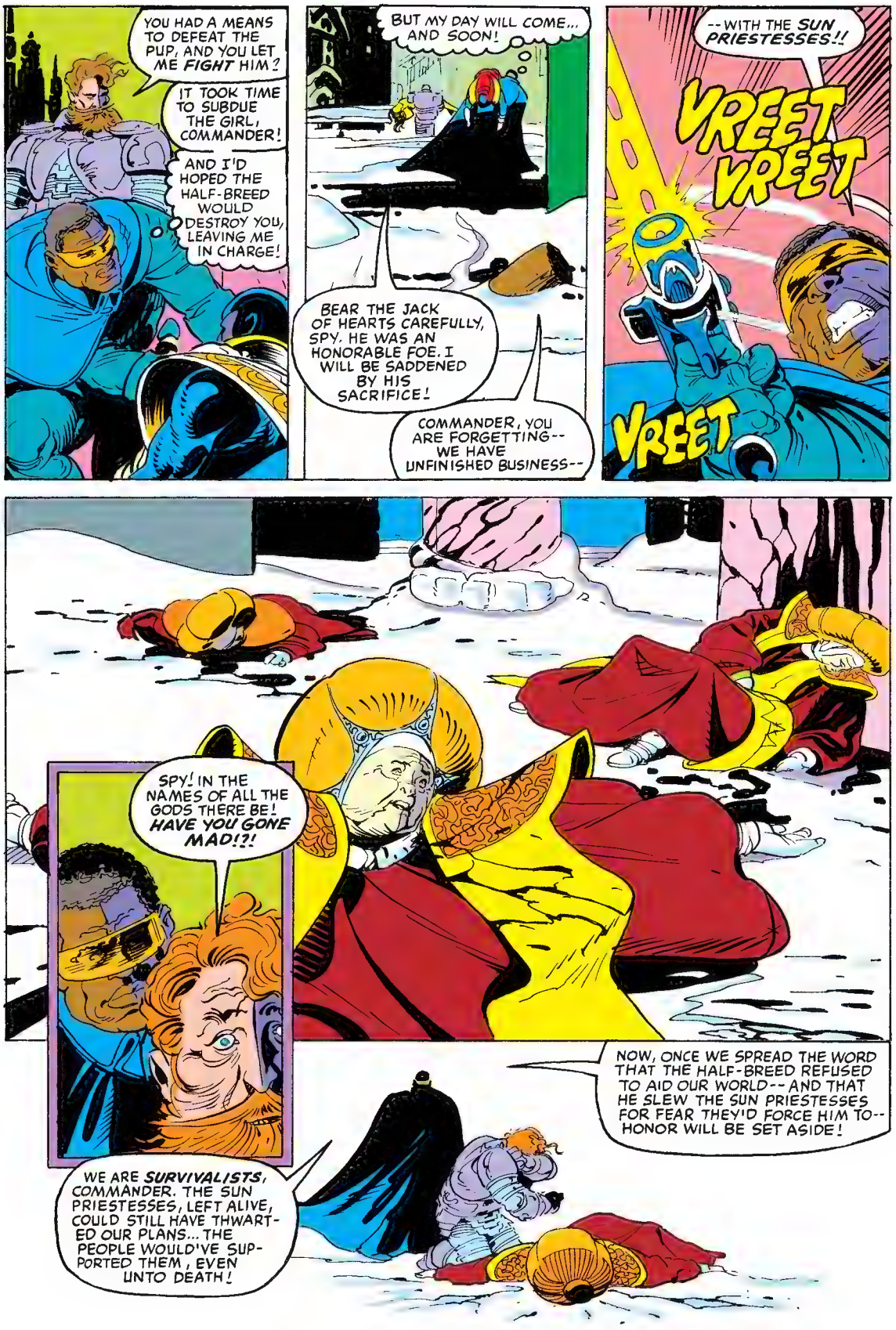

I'VE GOTTA PROTECT HER! C'MON, NEUTRO-MIST-- WEAR-OFF!
KAINA, DON'T YOU SEE? I'M IN NO DANGER FROM THE SURVIVALISTS--
--BUT YOU FACE DISTINCT DANGER,,, FROM ME!
JACK MUST MEAN THAT THE EFFECTS OF HIS NEUTRO-MIST BATH, WHICH ALLOWED US TO BE TOGETHER, HE WITHOUT HIS COSTUME--
--ARE FADING! WITHOUT HIS ARMOR TO CONTAIN HIS RETURNING POWER, THERE IS NO MEASURING THE POWER THAT MAY BE UNLEASHED!
UNCONTROLLABLE POWER! JACK BADE ME LEAVE,,, AS NOT TO HURT ME HIM-SELF!
WHAT A HERO IS THIS MAN I LOVE!
SO! WHAT HAVE WE HERE?!
THE HALF-BREED'S CONSORT, COMMANDER!
VARGA!!
YOU CAN CALL OFF YOUR SURVIVALIST SCUM, VARGA! JACK HAS OFFERED TO SACRIFICE HIMSELF TO SAVE OUR WORLD!
LIES! NO MAN WOULD WILLINGLY GIVE HIS LIFE!
I WOULDN'T EXPECT YOU TO UNDERSTAND, SURVIVALIST! BUT NOT ALL MEN ARE SO SELFLESS--
"--AS THE JACK OF HEARTS!"
SH'SKROOM!

GODS--!
THE VERY TOP OF THE TOWER OF THE SUN--SHEARED OFF--AS IF BY A WHITE-HOT KNIFE!
FOR SOME MOMENTS, THE TRIO ASSEMBLED AT THE BASE OF THE TOWER STANDS STUNNED. DEBRIS RAINS DOWN UPON THEM. THE VERY AIR, CONVULSED BY THE CONCUSSIVE FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION, SEEMS TO SHAKE AND SHIMMER, UNTIL THEY NO LONGER TRUST THEIR OWN SIGHT.
HI, MARCY. GOT COMPANY, I SEE!
JACK!!
HE SURVIVED! THE HALF-BREED SURVIVED!
POWER!
IT'S HIS POWER! ENOUGH TO CREATE SO DEVASTATING A BLAST--IT COULD REKINDLE OUR SUN!!
DO AS WE SAY, HALF-BREED, OR YOUR LOVER DIES!
YOU FOOLS! WHY WON'T YOU LISTEN!!
THE TIME FOR TALKING IS PAST! OUR WORLD IS ENDANGERED! A MEANS EXISTS TO SAVE IT! I WILL EMPLOY THAT MEANS... DESPITE MY DISHONOR!
DONNING COMBAT ARMOR THAT HAS PROVEN IN THE PAST AT LEAST SOMEWHAT ABLE TO SUSTAIN THE PULSING POWER OF THE JACK OF HEARTS...
... COMMANDER VARGA LAUNCHES A ONE-MAN ATTACK IN AN ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE THE YOUNG HERO!
GEEZ! YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CAN'T HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT, TOO!

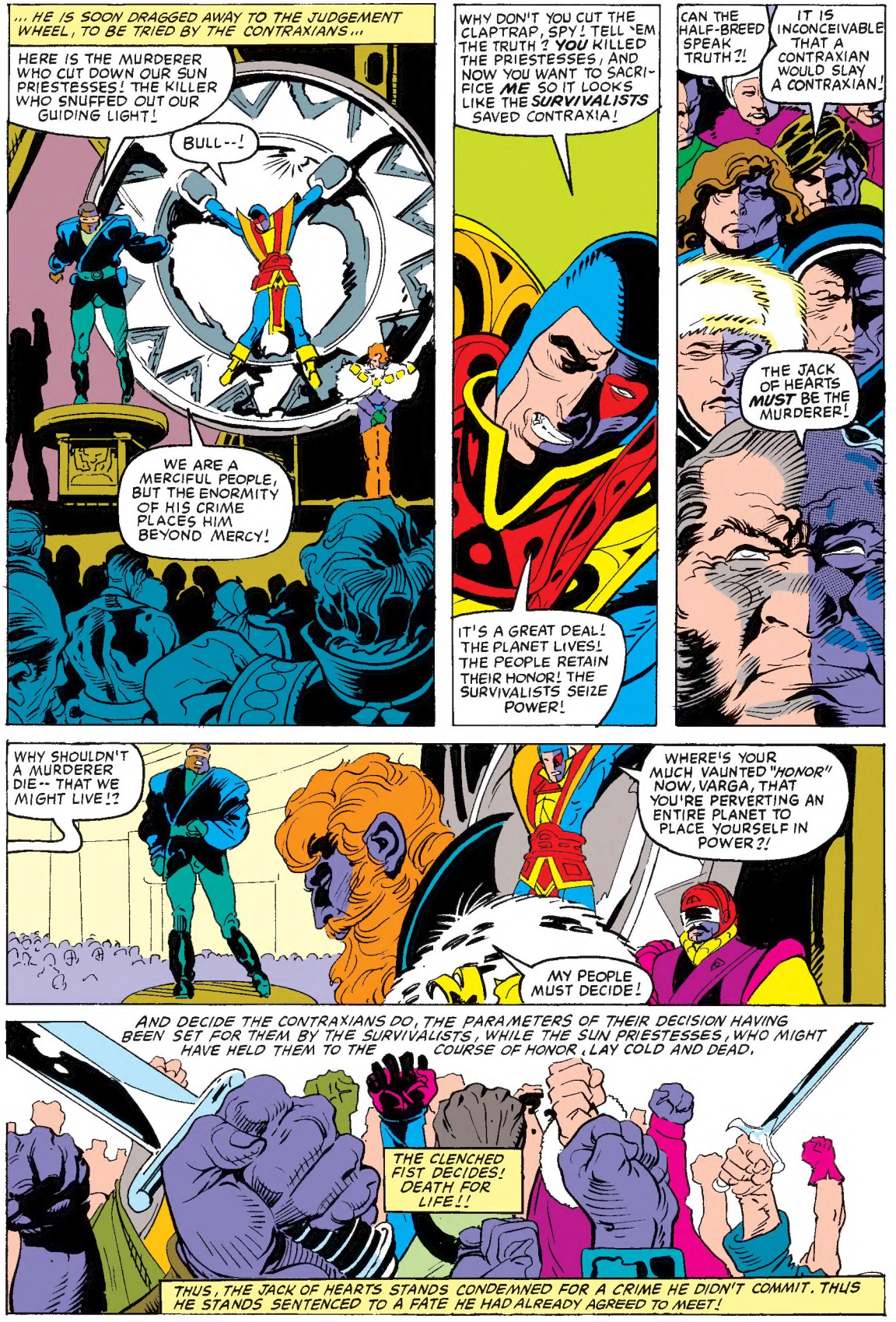
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND YOUR EARTHLY EUPHEMISMS, PUP!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND MUCH OF ANYTHING, DO YOU?
I UNDERSTAND YOUR LIFE MUST BE OFFERED FOR CONTRAXIA!!
T-KLANG
WELL, AT LEAST WE AGREE ON SOMETHING!
SKROOM
BUT IF I GOTTA DIE I'D LIKE TO DO IT IN MY OWN WAY-- MY OWN TIME!
ZRAK!
CONTRAXIA CANNOT WAIT, HALF-BREED!
WE NEED YOUR POWER-- AND WE SHALL HAVE IT--

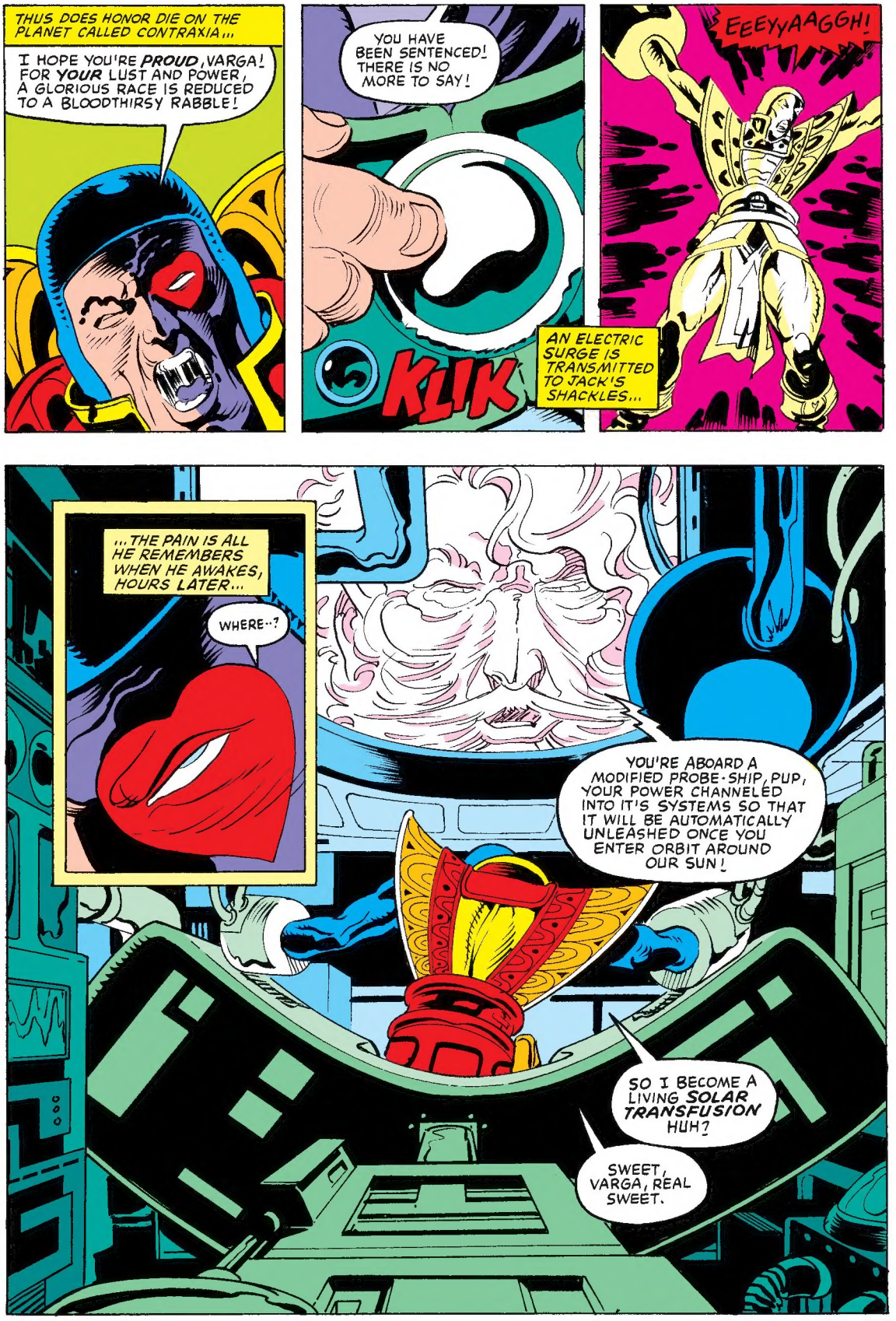
NOW!
YOU'RE MAKING ME START TO REGRET MY DECISION, VARGA!
SHSKROW
BUT, THEN, I DIDN'T MAKE IT FOR YOU!
ARE YOU READY TO STOP SLUGGING AND LISTEN TO WHAT A BONEHEAD YOU'VE BEEN?
NO! I'VE HEARD REAMS OF REASONS, PAGES OF PLATITUDES, STATING WHY CONTRAXIA MUST DIE! THEN WE WERE FACED WITH NO ALTERNATIVE--
--BUT NOW, SALVATION IS IN OUR GRASP-- AND I INTEND TO SEIZE IT! ONCE SAVED, THE CITIZENRY WILL THANK ME!
OH, GOOD GRIEF--!
AND, AS JACK TRIES UNSUCCESSFULY TO CONVINCE VARGA THAT HE HAS ALREADY CONSENTED TO THE ACT THE SURVIVALISTS WISH TO FORCE HIM TO DO, MARCY MANAGES TO CONVINCE THE SPY...
THE TALE RINGS TRUE!
BUT, SHOULD THE HALF-BREED SACRIFICE HIMSELF, HE WOULD BE ACCLAIMED A MARTYR--
-- WHILE THE SURVIVALISTS WOULD REAP NOTHING FROM HIS DEATH!
S.H.I.E.L.D.
3ML NEUTRO-MIST
BUT, IF IT APPEARS HE WAS UNWILLING TO DO THE NOBLE THING AND WE HAD TO FORCE HIM--
Y-YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED IN SAVING OUR WORLD, ONLY IN RULING IT!!
AND TO DO IT, YOU'D MAKE THE NOBILITY OF JACK'S ACT... MEANINGLESS!

WHY, OF COURSE!
WOK
OOohhh....
SLEEP MY LOVELY, LEST YOUR LIPS UTTER TO OTHERS--ESPECIALLY TO THE DEAR DELUDED COMMANDER--THE SAME TRUTH THEY'VE TOLD ME!
YOUR HALF-BREED SHALL DIE AS HE'S RESOLVED TO DO! BUT WE SURVIVALISTS SHALL REAP THE PRAISE OF A THANKFUL PLANET FOR HAVING "FORCED" HIM TO DO THE ACT!
AND CONTRAXIA SHALL BE NONE THE WISER!
TAKING THE CANNISTER HE'D STOLEN FROM S.H.I.E.L.D. WHILE ON EARTH...
...THE SURVIVALIST SPY MOVES TOWARD THE BATTLE...
YIELD, HALF-BREED! I HAVE COME TO RESPECT YOU FOR YOUR POWER AND COURAGE! WERE NOT MY PLANET AT STAKE, I'D NEVER DISHONOR MYSELF BY DRIVING YOU TO YOUR DOOM NOW!
YEAH! YOU'RE A REAL "HONORABLE MAN", RIGHT, VARGA!?
WELL, MAYBE IT'D CUT YOUR SELF-ESTEEM DOWN A PEG TO KNOW YOU'RE FORCING ME TO DO SOMETHING I'VE ALREADY AGREED TO DO!
HEY! NEUTRO-MIST--CANCELING MY POWER!!
IT WILL RETURN, HALF-BREED--IN TIME TO SPARK OUR DYING SUN!
UNTIL THEN, LET YOUR VOICE BE SILENCED!
SOK!
A MERE PUNCH DEFEATS ONE WHO WAS POWER INCARNATE MOMENTS BEFORE.


YOU HAD A MEANS TO DEFEAT THE PUP, AND YOU LET ME FIGHT HIM?
IT TOOK TIME TO SUBDUE THE GIRL, COMMANDER!
AND I'D HOPED THE HALF-BREED WOULD DESTROY YOU, LEAVING ME IN CHARGE!
BUT MY DAY WILL COME... AND SOON!
BEAR THE JACK OF HEARTS CAREFULLY, SPY. HE WAS AN HONORABLE FOE. I WILL BE SADDENED BY HIS SACRIFICE!
COMMANDER, YOU ARE FORGETTING-- WE HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS--
--WITH THE SUN PRIESTESSES!!
VREET VREET
VREET
SPY! IN THE NAMES OF ALL THE GODS THERE BE! HAVE YOU GONE MAD!?!
NOW, ONCE WE SPREAD THE WORD THAT THE HALF-BREED REFUSED TO AID OUR WORLD-- AND THAT HE SLEW THE SUN PRIESTESSES FOR FEAR THEY'D FORCE HIM TO-- HONOR WILL BE SET ASIDE!
WE ARE SURVIVALISTS, COMMANDER. THE SUN PRIESTESSES, LEFT ALIVE, COULD STILL HAVE THWARTED OUR PLANS... THE PEOPLE WOULD'VE SUPPORTED THEM, EVEN UNTO DEATH!

... AND THE POPULACE WILL HAIL OUR PUNISHMENT OF THE JACK OF HEARTS BY CONDEMNING HIM TO THE DEATH THAT WILL SAVE OUR WORLD!
YOU ARE... WITHOUT HONOR!
I FOLLOW BUT ONE CREED, COMMANDER, SURVIVAL!
AH, MAY THE GODS DESTROY ME FOR ALIGNING MYSELF WITH THE LIKES OF YOU!
BUT, THE DEED IS DONE, THERE'S NO UNDOING IT!
LET THE SALVATION, AND THE SHAME--BE ON MY HEAD!
THINGS MOVE RATHER QUICKLY NOW, AS A CROWD, CONVERGES TO INVESTIGATE THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TOWER...
WHAT TRANSPIRES HERE?
MURDER MOST HEINOUS, PEOPLE OF CONTRAXIA! THE SUN-PRIESTESSES IMPLORED THE HALF-BREED TO USE HIS POWER TO SAVE US, AND SNEERING, HE SAVAGELY MURDERED THEM!
THE TALE IS THUS TOLD...
YEAH! AND IT'S ALL LIES!!
I'D ALREADY AGREED TO SACRIFICE MYSELF TO SAVE CONTRAXIA WHEN THE SURVIVALISTS BUSTED IN AND BLEW AWAY THE PRIESTESSES!
BUT JACK'S PROTESTATIONS GO UNHEEDED, AND, HIS POWER STILL NEGATED BY NEUTRO-MISTS...


... HE IS SOON DRAGGED AWAY TO THE JUDGEMENT WHEEL, TO BE TRIED BY THE CONTRAXIANS...
HERE IS THE MURDERER WHO CUT DOWN OUR SUN PRIESTESSES! THE KILLER WHO SNUFFED OUT OUR GUIDING LIGHT!
BULL--!
WE ARE A MERCIFUL PEOPLE, BUT THE ENORMITY OF HIS CRIME PLACES HIM BEYOND MERCY!
WHY DON'T YOU CUT THE CLAPTRAP, SPY! TELL 'EM THE TRUTH? YOU KILLED THE PRIESTESSES, AND NOW YOU WANT TO SACRIFICE ME SO IT LOOKS LIKE THE SURVIVALISTS SAVED CONTRAXIA!
IT'S A GREAT DEAL! THE PLANET LIVES! THE PEOPLE RETAIN THEIR HONOR! THE SURVIVALISTS SEIZE POWER!
CAN THE HALF-BREED SPEAK TRUTH?!
IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT A CONTRAXIAN WOULD SLAY A CONTRAXIAN!
THE JACK OF HEARTS MUST BE THE MURDERER!
WHY SHOULDN'T A MURDERER DIE -- THAT WE MIGHT LIVE!?
WHERE'S YOUR MUCH VAUNTED "HONOR" NOW, VARGA, THAT YOU'RE PERVERTING AN ENTIRE PLANET TO PLACE YOURSELF IN POWER?!
MY PEOPLE MUST DECIDE!
AND DECIDE THE CONTRAXIANS DO, THE PARAMETERS OF THEIR DECISION HAVING BEEN SET FOR THEM BY THE SURVIVALISTS, WHILE THE SUN PRIESTESSES, WHO MIGHT HAVE HELD THEM TO THE COURSE OF HONOR, LAY COLD AND DEAD.
THE CLENCHED FIST DECIDES! DEATH FOR LIFE!!
THUS, THE JACK OF HEARTS STANDS CONDEMNED FOR A CRIME HE DIDN'T COMMIT. THUS HE STANDS SENTENCED TO A FATE HE HAD ALREADY AGREED TO MEET!


THUS DOES HONOR DIE ON THE PLANET CALLED CONTRAXIA...
I HOPE YOU'RE PROUD, VARGA! FOR YOUR LUST AND POWER, A GLORIOUS RACE IS REDUCED TO A BLOODTHIRSY RABBLE!
YOU HAVE BEEN SENTENCED! THERE IS NO MORE TO SAY!
KLIK
AN ELECTRIC SURGE IS TRANSMITTED TO JACK'S SHACKLES...
EEEyyAAGGH!
...THE PAIN IS ALL HE REMEMBERS WHEN HE AWAKES, HOURS LATER...
WHERE..?
YOU'RE ABOARD A MODIFIED PROBE-SHIP, PUP, YOUR POWER CHANNELED INTO IT'S SYSTEMS SO THAT IT WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY UNLEASHED ONCE YOU ENTER ORBIT AROUND OUR SUN!
SO I BECOME A LIVING SOLAR TRANSFUSION HUH?
SWEET, VARGA, REAL SWEET.

"I TAKE NO DELIGHT IN WHAT I DO, PUP, BUT CONTRAXIA MUST SURVIVE!"
THINGS WOULD'VE BEEN FINE IF YOU'D LEFT ME ALONE!
I...KNOW THAT...NOW. BUT THE DEATH OF THE PRIESTESSES FORCED MY HAND!
SURE! IF YOUR PEOPLE KNEW YOU'D SLAIN 'EM, THEY'D HAVE SOONER ACCEPTED DEATH, THAN ALLOW MY SACRIFICE!
BUT THE WAY THINGS STAND NOW, I'M A PERFECT SCAPEGOAT!
SO FEED ME TO YOUR STINKING SUN, VARGA! BUT REMEMBER, WHEN I DIE, I DIE WITH HONOR!
YOU...BUDDY, YOU GOTTA LIVE WITH SHAME!
...ITS COURSE CHARTED FOR THE CENTER OF A DYING SUN!!
NO, JACK OF HEARTS. NECESSITY DEMANDS I GO THROUGH WITH YOUR SACRIFICE, BUT I WILL NOT DELUDE MYSELF THAT THERE IS HONOR IN THE TASK!
I SWEAR THAT AS SOON AS YOU ARE SWALLOWED INTO THE SEARING HEART OF OUR SUN -- THERE WILL BE ONE LESS CONTRAXIAN TO BASK IN ITS WARMTH!
THE SOLAR PROBE BLASTS OFF FROM CONTRAXIA...
NEXT ISSUE: HEART ATTACK!!

KAMIC RIDER
MARIKA